

## WINCHESTER 02: Winchester Gazette

- 01: The Virginia Centinel or The Winchester Mercury (1788-1790)
  - 02: Bowen's Virginia Centinel & Gazette or The Winchester Political Repository (1790-93)
  - 03: Bowen's Virginia Centinel and Gazette or The Winchester Repository (1793-1796)
  - 04: Bowen's Virginia Gazette and the Winchester Centinel (1796-1798)
  - 05: Winchester Gazette (1798-1808)
  - 06: The Centinel and Winchester Gazette (1808-1809)
  - 07: Winchester Gazette (1809-1819)
  - 08: The Winchester Gazette (1819-1826)
  - 09: Winchester Virginian (1826-1862)
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The second newspaper published in Winchester began as an unswerving competitor to the first. Like that rival, it was a weekly advertiser that served the region's mercantile interests, but did so more effectively, resulting in the end of its predecessor. The weekly's proprietors built on that primacy over the ensuing years, allowing their paper to adapt to the evolution of partisan journalism in the antebellum era, before it expired during the Civil War.

The paucity of surviving numbers of Winchester's earliest newspapers – the first of Matthias Bartgis (024), started in 1787, and this second by Richard Bowen (045), begun in 1788 – has led to the conflation of those two journals in the older histories of the city. While Bowen's weekly did not adopt the title of *Gazette* until long after the demise of Bartgis's *Gazette*, the distance between them was sufficient to lead those historians to report that Bowen's paper succeeded Bartgis's; consequently, their erroneous accounts are now commonly repeated in online sources, especially non-professional ones, as those accounts are readily-available materials now out of copyright, and so free of cost today. However, the voluminous catalog records and digital newspaper collections currently available allow scholars to correct such faulty descriptions, as is undertaken here.

### Origins

By the late 1780s, Winchester had developed into a key trading center at the intersection of the Great Wagon Road from Philadelphia southwest to Kentucky and Tennessee and the Virginia routes northwest to Braddock's Road and the upper Ohio River Valley beyond. The setting and its commercial potential attracted the attention of printer-publisher Matthias Bartgis (024) of nearby Frederick, Maryland; having established two weekly papers there in 1785 – one German-language sheet and the other in English – he was determined by 1787 to extend the reach of his business along the Great Wagon Road to the north and south; Winchester became his initial focus after encountering Henry Willcocks (444), a journeyman printer who had recently abandoned an attempt to start a newspaper in the Rappahannock River port of Tappahannock; together they introduced *The Virginia Gazette and Winchester Advertiser* on July 11, 1787.

Unfortunately, it seems that tensions soon developed between Bartgis and Willcocks over the conduct of their paper, inducing Willcocks to part company with his partner after just six months. That separation probably developed from financial issues, as was the case in many of Bartgis's early business arrangements; but it was also likely a product of the cross-cultural nature of their paper. By essentially serving two masters, neither was satisfied in the effort, and the English-speaking merchants of the lower Shenandoah Valley were obviously more lucrative patrons than could be the cash-poor German farmers of the region. So it is little surprising that an English-language weekly soon followed Bartgis's, with Willcocks assisting its proprietor, Richard Bowen, just as he had with its cross-cultural predecessor.

Bowen was an English immigrant, purportedly once a schoolmaster, who had published the first daily paper issued in Baltimore in the summer of 1787. That venture survived less than a month because of a dearth of subscribers, compelling Bowen to leave Maryland before his creditors could file suits against him. Some accounts have Bowen working in Alexandria as a journeyman shortly thereafter, but evidence for such employment is wanting. What is clear is that by the spring of 1788, he had brought his press to Winchester and had joined with Willcocks to offer a competitor to Bartgis's *Virginia Gazette*.

*The Virginia Centinel or The Winchester Mercury* made its first appearance on April 2, 1788. Its challenge to Bartgis was clear in the chosen motto – the old Roman axiom "Patria Cara, Carior Libertas" [*the nation is dear, but liberty dearer*]; it was a vigorous counterpoint to the *Gazette's* choice of a line from Cicero's *Oration for Marcellus*: "Malim videri nimis timidus quam parum prudens" [*rather appear too timid than not careful enough*]. Both Bowen and Willcocks were robust advocates of the new Federal Constitution, where Bartgis's paper had apparently evinced substantial ambivalence in the ratification debates of the past winter, manifesting the sociocultural divides of the lower Valley. And with the first elections under that compact about to be held, political discourse now concerned the ways that individual liberties could be secured through amendments to the Constitution, and which candidates would support such a process. Thus, the *Centinel's* masthead made it self-evident where the new weekly stood, in contrast to the older *Gazette*. (Bartgis eventually changed his motto to a line from James Thomson's 1735 poem *Liberty*, although altering two words therein to match the contemporary political discourse.)

Still, Willcocks was the junior partner in this alliance, despite his foregoing efforts at trade independence, as can be readily seen in the proprietary name behind this weekly – Richard Bowen & Co. That subordinate status led him to seek autonomy elsewhere during the latter part of 1788; Bartgis had started another paper in York, Pennsylvania, in October 1787, but was forced to close it when his resident partner brought suit against him for fraud; it seems the merchant community there wanted to revive their mercantile advertiser without having to deal with Bartgis; so they offered Willcocks the chance to join a pair of financial backers in publishing a new weekly, an offer the printer quickly accepted; thus, the appendage "& Co." disappeared from the *Centinel's* colophon with the issue of December 17, 1788, and Bowen became the paper's sole proprietor. Meanwhile, Willcocks's new weekly appeared in York on January 7, 1789.

## Federalist Stalwart

It is clear that Willcocks's leaving did not damage either Bowen or his *Centinel*. The content of Bartgis's *Gazette* often targeted ethnic-Germans, driving merchants who wanted to reach prospective customers in the English-speaking communities of the lower Valley to employ Bowen's journal. At this time, the two Winchester sheets were the only ones published west of the Blue Ridge in Virginia, and each publisher was intent on drawing subscribers from the areas to the south of the market town as well. That aspiration allowed Bartgis to convince Bowen that they should jointly publish a mercantile advertiser in Staunton; but their *Staunton Gazette or Weekly Western Star* lasted just three months in early 1790 because it addressed only the merchant interests of the northern Valley, and not the needs of readers in the central Valley.

That joint effort seems an act of desperation on Bartgis's part, as he had just lost his second partner in the *Gazette*, and that printer was about to start publishing a third weekly paper in Winchester. Nathaniel Willis (449) of Boston had joined the *Gazette* office once Willcocks made it known that he would be leaving the press at the end of 1787; a truly revolutionary voice during the war years, his radicalism had compelled his departure from Massachusetts in the midst of Shays' Rebellion in 1786; but in a two-year-long association with Bartgis, the well-versed Willis developed an understanding that the *Gazette's* purpose was ever more untenable, and that the mercantile focus of Bowen's *Centinel* left yeoman farmers in the lower Valley without a vehicle for expressing their political opinions; so he set out to offer an alternative to both in March 1790.

When *Willis's Virginia Gazette and Winchester Advertiser* first issued, its two competitors were faced with an unexpected confusion among potential readers and advertisers over who published which weekly. Consequently, all three papers quickly made the surname of its proprietor a part of its title. As a result, *Willis's Virginia Gazette* was readily identifiable as the populist weekly, *Bartgis's Virginia Gazette* as the cross-cultural weekly, and *Bowen's Virginia Centinel* as the mercantile weekly. In this mix, Bowen's emerged as the most viable paper, and so the most widely distributed as well; Willis found that the cash-poor state of his intended readers made his paper the least viable, sending him first to Shepherdstown, and then to Martinsburg, in search of a workable foundation for his editorial perspective; in contrast, Bartgis continued to offer his journal to an ever-shrinking audience in the northern Valley and was finally forced to end its publication in late 1791.

This thinning left Bowen's *Centinel* as the only newspaper published in Winchester for the ensuing eight years. That monopoly gave him the confidence to alter the title of his journal from being a *Centinel* that guarded individual liberties in 1796 to a *Gazette* whose content was both legitimate and authoritative in 1797. But more importantly, the recast *Winchester Gazette* prospered from Bowen's unceasing willingness to serve the needs of commercial interests there, and this new title now identified the weekly with those particular regional interests. Yet that commitment also meant that his journal became ever-more strident in its support of the domestic and foreign policies of the Federalist administrations in the nation's capital. Consequently, his newspaper faced challenges from Jeffersonian alternatives from 1799 on, all of which Bowen weathered without difficulty. Indeed, it was not until 1810 that

a partisan alternative to the *Winchester Gazette* successfully took root there, leaving those foes dependent on journals published in Martinsburg, Hagerstown, and Charlestown.

The durability of his weekly was also a function of his office's role as a job-printing concern. Such ancillary activities grew as Bowen's paper grew, requiring him to expand his staff over time. Key figures in that development were three sons of Winchester merchant Frederick Heiskell – William (211), John (210), and Frederick Jr. (209) – who Bowen trained in the years after 1800. Hence, the brothers were also pivotal characters in the *Gazette's* survival when Bowen died unexpectedly on June 1, 1808.

William Heiskell, then the shop's foreman, assumed control of the weekly for the benefit of himself and Bowen's heirs with the issue of June 7th. But this was an *ad hoc* arrangement, as Bowen died intestate, and no one was willing to act as administrator of his estate given the extent of the debt he carried, thus making any settlement difficult. So in September, the city's Hustings Court ordered an auction sale of Bowen's property, including his press and its supplies, to settle those debts; as a part of the sale notice, Heiskell made it clear that the forthcoming sale would not interrupt publication of the *Gazette*, as he held "an interest in the office which will remain unimpaired until at least the 1st of January, 1815." That vesting evidently limited the number of bidders for the office, which Heiskell then obtained outright at the advertised October sale, apparently using family money (provided by his father) to purchase the rest of the business and then employing family labor (embodied in brothers John and Frederick) to keep it running.

The change in ownership did little to alter the editorial course of the *Winchester Gazette*. In fact, it seems that the weekly took on an ever-sharper, anti-administration perspective after falling into the hands of the Heiskell family. Such was likely a reaction, in part, to the impact of the Embargo of 1807 on commerce generally in the neighborhood and the absence of a financial recovery following its relaxation in early 1809. Yet the Heiskells ongoing opposition to the popular James Madison allowed a competing partisan journal to finally survive in the town – the *Republican Constellation* of Jonathan Foster (168) – so challenging the *Gazette's* financial stability. William Heiskell appears to have tired of the effort by late 1810 and sold the business to elder brother John at the beginning of 1811; he eventually relocated to the Knoxville area where he established himself as a slave-holding patrician and major regional political figure, although no longer a publisher or journalist.

John Heiskell, however, was faced with the loss of the familial help during his tenure as the *Gazette's* proprietor. Brother Frederick moved on to Tennessee as well in 1814, leaving him dependent on non-family hands to operate his press; thus he trained several of the young printers who became part of the town's print trade during the 1810s. Yet the competition with Foster and a want of direct evidence makes it difficult to link individuals in that cohort to the office where they trained. Heiskell was most likely responsible for the training of the Hines brothers, John (221a) and William (221b), sons of Frederick County weaver William Hines, and Peter Klipstine (253), son of the town's most-respected physician, who he teased in an 1812 marriage notice; it is possible that he also trained the brothers Caldwell, James (071) and Joseph (073), the sons of a prominent lawyer in the county, although their later association with Republican presses suggest that Foster was their master and mentor. Still,

Heiskell plainly managed the ebb and flow of tradesmen through his office and guided his *Gazette* through the disruptions attending the War of 1812 – even as inconsistencies in the number sequence seen in the few surviving issues makes it impracticable to determine how often, if at all, that he was compelled to suspend publication during that conflict, as so many Virginia papers did in those years.

In the wake of the war, though, patronage for Heiskell's *Gazette* went into a slow decline. The growing number of journals in the region, on either side of the Potomac and of both political persuasions, drew readers and advertisers to papers issued in those nearby locales. It did not help that Federalist sheets generally had been discredited by their opposition to a war that most Americans now thought that the United States had won. Nor did it help that Heiskell continued to lambast those Virginians who supported and aided the Madison and Monroe administrations. Indeed, he became a highly visible contributor to an ugly exchange in 1818 between Leesburg's rival newspapers – the *Genius of Liberty* of Republican Samuel B.T. Caldwell (074) and the *Washingtonian* of Federalist Patrick McIntyre (289) – involving the conduct of Charles Fenton Mercer, that town's Congressional representative, over his questioning of the motives of Republican Armistead T. Mason, who challenged his election in 1816 on grounds of fraudulent voting. (The controversy led to a duel in 1819 that ended in Mason's death at the hands of Mercer's cousin, John Mason McCarty, who was offended by the challenger's conduct.)

But it was Heiskell's own financial situation that compelled him to offer the *Gazette* for sale in the summer of 1823. Noting that he was "induced by considerations arising out of his late domestic affliction," which he left unspecified (and so certainly an item of common gossip), Heiskell described his business being one that "commanded a more regular and substantial patronage" than similar establishments "in the interior of the country." The buyer was Thomas Jones, "a London gentleman, who had belonged to the army then warring with the Sepoys," meaning the British East India Company forces that defeated the Maratha Empire in 1818. Jones took possession of the weekly with the first issue of October 1823, and immediately found himself adrift in a sea of political and cultural discord he did not comprehend. The so-called "Era of Good Feelings" was anything but that, and the 1824 election cycle evinced that fallacy in presenting four candidates for the presidency; Jones chose to support the one least popular in the area, John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, when Virginians were divided between the three other contenders. So by November 1824, Jones had squandered the advantages conveyed to him, forcing him to sell the newspaper at a substantial loss.

As Heiskell apparently still held notes that Jones had used to buy the *Gazette*, the former proprietor became Jones's successor as well, primarily in order to expedite and simplify the weekly's transfer before it expired under the weight of its debt. Asserting that the cause of Jones's difficulties was the fact that he was a "foreigner, and a stranger to our habits, our manners and our taste," Heiskell announced his reluctant reacquisition of the *Gazette*:

"I cannot conceal that I take possession of the establishment under very discouraging circumstances.—A reduced subscription list, and the withdrawal of the support of many of the most valuable advertising Patrons constitute two of the most promi-

ment (and, to an Editor, the most interesting) items in the list of grievances.—As, however, I have again unexpectedly assumed the perplexing duties of an Editor, I shall endeavor to render the Gazette worthy of the support of its former friends and Patrons, and of the public generally..."

Yet the journal's fortunes did not visibly improve with Heiskell's return. Part of the *Gazette's* ongoing difficulties concerned the competitive environment in Winchester; the *Republican Constellation* had evolved into a journal supporting Henry Clay rather than Andrew Jackson, the populist choice, under the management of Samuel H. Davis (126), formerly associated with Samuel Snowden (393), the arch-Federalist proprietor of the *Alexandria Gazette*; that evolution gave Winchester two journals that did not represent the Jacksonian inclinations of many, if not most, in that part of Virginia. And given a choice between an Adams paper and a Clay one, the mercantile community that had so long supported Heiskell's weekly chose his competitor from 1823 onward. Consequently, the days of the *Winchester Gazette* were numbered when Heiskell returned to ownership in late 1824.

### **Political Transformation**

Facing the collapse of his business in October 1826, Heiskell sold his press and subscriber list to one Joseph H. Sherrard; about six weeks later, Sherrard issued the first number of his *Winchester Virginian*. Most authorities record this weekly as being an entirely new journal, but the fact that he acquired Heiskell's subscriber list, along with his press, makes this paper a successor to the *Gazette*, even though not a continuation, so its inclusion in this Index.

Joseph Holmes Sherrard (1802-89) was then a young lawyer from nearby Morgan County who had just started to practice there; over the next five decades, he became a dominant figure in the political and commercial life of Winchester. In this initial foray into the public sphere, Sherrard embodied an effort by local Jacksonians to convert a newspaper with long-standing Federalist proclivities into the Democratic organ that they had lost in the evolution of the *Republican Constellation* into a Clay journal. The motto he chose for his paper reveals the disappointment he and his partisan friends felt over that loss; he quoted Horace's first *Satire* – "verum dicere quid vetat" [*what is to prevent one from telling truth*] – but in doing so he removed the leading word "ridentem" [*in a laughing way*], revealing a certain sense of bitterness among the county's Democratic-Republicans. Sherrard was assisted by printer John B. Patterson (1805-90); a Botetourt County native, Patterson reportedly trained in the Heiskell office and so came with that office when Sherrard bought it; he served as the shop-foreman until the winter of 1827-28, when he moved to Leesburg to conduct a Jacksonian paper of his own. He was one of only three printers who can be readily identified with the *Virginian* in a subordinate role over its four-decade-long existence, evidently because they each had an ownership interest that their anonymous colleagues lacked.

Sherrard continued as the weekly's sole proprietor until about November 1829 when he brought in Edgar W. Robinson (1804-49) as his editorial partner. Robinson was trained by the former Winchester printer Joseph F. Caldwell at the Fincastle office which produced his *Herald of the Valley* there; he became Caldwell's partner in 1822 and his successor in 1823, recasting the *Herald* as the ardently-Jacksonian *Fincastle Mirror*, which he published until

the fall of 1829. At that time, Sherrard offered Robinson an interest in the *Virginian* in an apparent effort to both reduce his editorial workload and reinvigorate his paper's content; Robinson accepted the offer, triggering the abrupt sale of his *Mirror* and his departure for Winchester. Initially, Robinson's ownership was masked by the proprietary name "Joseph H. Sherrard & Co.," though his participation was evident in the paper's content; it was not until the dawning of Jackson's 1832 reelection campaign that spring that his name appeared in conjunction with Sherrard's in the paper's colophon. The timing of that appearance seems to indicate that the two men had then crafted a one-year arrangement to share equally in the *Virginian's* profits that year, as in May 1833, Sherrard retired from journalism to pursue his growing investments in Winchester's banking and corporate concerns.

Despite being trained as a printer, Robinson now moved away from the mechanical side of the trade. He promptly forged a new partnership with John W. Hollis (1811-44), a printer in (and probably foreman of) the competing *Winchester Republican* office, creating the firm of Robinson & Hollis. This arrangement was the beginning of a relationship between the two that continued beyond Winchester. In June 1837, Robinson was designated as Winchester's postmaster by Postmaster General Amos Kendall (1789-1869); that posting put pressure on him to sell the *Virginian*, as it created an obvious conflict of interest between his function as a disinterested public servant while engaged in partisan journalism, with Kendall being well-known for serving as the patronage manager in the Jackson and Van Buren administrations, of which the *Virginian* had always been a vigorous supporter; so Robinson and Hollis sold the weekly to Lewis Eichelberger (1803-60), pastor of Winchester's Lutheran church, on the last day of 1837.

Hollis removed to Washington the next summer where he was employed as a journeyman in an unnamed press office; but in late 1839, he rejoined Robinson as part of a scheme crafted by Kendall to send the publisher to Kentucky to conduct a campaign paper for Van Buren in the 1840 election. Robinson had recently accepted a new post from Kendall as a clerk in the Post Office Department and wanted to use Hollis as his substitute (i.e. placeholder) in that role until he returned to Washington after the election; Kendall agreed, but when the Whigs in Congress learned of the ploy, public hearings into the matter were held; Robinson was forced to resign as a clerk in a vain attempt to save Kendall; but he too was forced to resign once that investigation revealed that the Robinson-Hollis affair was but one of many irregularities in the Post Office Department under Kendall. Ironically, Hollis – the bit player in this drama – was the one who benefitted most from the tumult, being named to fill Robinson's post, a position he held until his death in 1844.

Eichelberger took control of the *Virginian* on January 1, 1838; a native of nearby Frederick, Maryland, he attended a Lutheran seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, before coming to Winchester in late 1828 to supply four vacant pulpits in the area; he apparently wrote for the *Virginian* from his earliest days in town, which convinced local Democrats to support his acquisition of the paper at the end of 1837. However, not being a trained printer, the new proprietor was compelled to find a suitable replacement for Hollis upon his departure in the summer of 1838; he found such in Edward M. Heist (1818-1900). Heist was apparently part of the trade circle centered on the Chambersburg, Pennsylvania office of the arch-Federalist publisher George Kenton Harper (1778-1858); he later married one of Harper's daughters,

so making him a brother-in-law to both Kenton Harper (203) of the *Staunton Spectator* and William Harper (1810-87), of the *South Branch Intelligencer* in nearby Romney; moreover, Harper's nephew, Robert G. Harper (1799-1870), published Gettysburg's *Adams Centinel* and so was someone Eichelberger undoubtedly knew from his days in that small town.

Despite employing such useful trade connections, Eichelberger's tenure as proprietor of the *Virginian* was one apparently fraught with difficulty. Few issues of the journal survive from his era, indicating that the paper was issued in very short print-runs during those years. Yet those few numbers suggest Eichelberger was essentially a caretaker who conveyed control of the weekly to a vigorous editorial writer during the important 1840 election cycle before resuming its management afterwards.

That course may have been shaped by Eichelberger's readiness to support Van Buren's plan to create a new central bank to replace the system of state-bank depositories for federal funds initiated under Jackson; while those banks were the main cause of the Panic of 1837 via their unrestrained lending, it was still a popular system among many Virginia Democrats in its representation of the primacy of states' rights over federal power; thus Eichelberger was faced with a conflict between the views of his local patrons and those of a Democratic administration trying to resolve the country's financial woes before the ensuing presidential election. So when the Whigs pressed for such a new central bank in 1840, after Van Buren's "independent treasury" plan had failed in a Democratic-controlled Congress, the *Winchester Virginian* needed to adopt a perspective that differed from the one that Eichelberger had previously embraced in order to rally support for Van Buren's reelection.

The key figure in that change of perspective was James Harvey Carson (1808-84). A lawyer who hailed from southern Frederick County, he was then the popular brigadier-general in command of the state militia units in the neighborhood; an avowed states' rights Democrat, Carson seems to have written for the *Virginian* from its sale in the winter of 1837-38, as some authorities report that he was the paper's editor from that date, even as they record Eichelberger as owner; he officially took control of the sheet in mid-July 1840, conducting it through that fall's election, and for some time thereafter. However, his efforts were not rewarded by an electoral victory, as Frederick County went to the Whig candidate, William Henry Harrison, by about a 4 to 3 margin in November. Sometime between December 1840 and April 1842 – most likely in early 1841, after the 1840 election was settled – Eichelberger reacquired Carson's interest in the *Virginian* and resumed sole ownership of paper.

Local party leaders clearly took serious notice of the *Virginian's* ineffectiveness in the 1840 cycle and so moved to revitalize their party organ in advance of the 1844 elections. They persuaded Eichelberger to sell the weekly to John C. Bowyer (1803-80) in mid-September 1843, several months before the presidential campaign began; at that fall's party caucus in Frederick County, Eichelberger insisted on adding a statement to the meeting's resolutions that explained his sale of his journal:

"*Resolved*, That it be earnestly recommended to our Democratic friends in this and the adjoining counties to use their personal efforts for enlarging the circulation of the Winchester Virginian, recently transferred to the charge of J.C. Bowyer, esq., with a view of securing a more efficient support to that important organ of the



Democratic party, and for the better disseminating Democratic principles."

Bowyer was a lawyer from Staunton, raised in a political household with his father serving as a Jeffersonian delegate in the Assembly for all but one of the fifteen sessions from 1810 to 1824; he is reported to have started writing for Democratic papers in 1836, the year of the first Van Buren campaign, but which papers he contributed to is not recorded; the easy transition from Eichelberger to Bowyer, with the unanimous approval of local Democratic leaders, suggests that the *Virginian* was one of those papers, and that he was thus known as a reliable advocate for their partisan views.

### **Advocate of Secession**

During Bowyer's tenure as proprietor of the *Winchester Virginian*, the sectional differences that would rend the country in 1861 became the chief concern for Frederick Democrats and so of their weekly. There was undoubtedly frustration among party loyalists in the county, as Frederick remained a Whig stronghold throughout this period, generally the result of the town's considerable mercantile element; but the influence of the *Virginian* can be seen in the fact the surrounding counties were just as solidly Democratic – just as Eichelberger had hoped – and those locales provided the paper its sustenance.

Following the election of James K. Polk in 1844, Bowyer's *Virginian* emerged as an ardent voice for the westward expansion of slavery, seeing the issue as one of choice by residents there rather than one determined by politicians in Washington. Hence it was an advocate for Texas annexation, a proponent of the subsequent Mexican War, and an opponent of the Wilmot Proviso that would have barred slavery from territories conquered in that war. But those considerations divided the national party along sectional lines in 1848, leading to the election of Zachary Taylor, a Whig who refused comment on the subject. Recognizing that defeat was inevitable that fall, Bowyer apparently decided to carry his pro-slavery campaign to a wider audience by removing to Alexandria and publishing a new journal there; hence he sold the *Virginian* to an equally ardent supporter of expansion: Edward Caledon Bruce.

Bruce (1825-1900) acquired the *Virginian* in early August 1848 with the assistance of two lawyers from nearby Charlestown: James W. Beller (1820-77), founder that town's *Spirit of Jefferson*, and Andrew J. O'Bannon (1815-60). Both Beller and O'Bannon were incidental to the transaction, which allowed a young writer who was deaf to become a journalist of some repute; they both sold their interests in the *Virginian* to Bruce sometime in the following year, leaving him sole proprietor. The journal's new owner was the son of John Bruce, a Scottish immigrant who was president of the new Winchester & Potomac Railroad, and so a partner in that project with the weekly's founder, Joseph H. Sherrard, evincing the tight-knit group that controlled the party and its paper in the Frederick County seat. The scion quickly developed a reputation for forceful advocacy of Southern rights, a view which would then evolve into one suggesting secession as a solution to the growing sectional conflict. But over time, the weekly routine also appears to have ground Bruce down; in late 1851, he added editorial assistance in the person of David Henry Wood (1819-76), a Frederick County native recently displaced from his position in the federal Pension Office following the retirement of that agency's creator, James L. Edwards (156), once a Democratic publisher in Petersburg; it

appears that Wood was in Bruce's employ for just a year, being someone brought in to help out during the 1852 campaign that made Franklin Pierce President. But after the death of his father in December 1855, Bruce clearly lost interest in conducting the weekly. Following the 1856 election, he sold the *Virginian* to John J. Palmer (1807-79), who proved to be the paper's last owner; thereafter, Bruce focused on writing and illustrating magazine articles, with irregular forays into portrait painting, though never abandoning his secessionist views.

Remarkably, Palmer was an even more passionate advocate of states' rights and Southern independence; a trained printer from Maryland, he came to Winchester from the office of the long-lived *Richmond Enquirer*, then conducted by Roger A. Pryor (1828-1919), himself an increasing strident secessionist. In the spring of 1857, Palmer left behind any notions of reconciliation with the North; J. H. Sherrard's eldest son William had gone west as part of the efforts by pro-slavery Southerners to force the acceptance of slavery in the Kansas Territory; he was killed there in April 1857 – a casualty of "Bleeding Kansas" – by a federal official after attempting to assassinate the territorial governor. Throughout the South, this event was reported as an attempt to suppress "popular sovereignty" in Kansas, when young Sherrard was seeking just such a result with his allies. But with the incident's connection to the elder Sherrard, local opinion was sympathetic to the bereaved father and increasingly receptive to Palmer's perspective on the sectional controversy.

Accordingly, Palmer's *Virginian* supported the Southern Democratic candidate in the 1860 election – John C. Breckinridge – and agitated for Virginia to ally with the newly-formed Confederacy immediately after its creation in February 1861. Following enactment of the Ordinance of Secession that May, his weekly became a conduit for public information on military activity in the northern Shenandoah Valley and those areas immediately to the west in the "traitorous" counties of modern-day West Virginia. But Palmer was also hampered by the material realities of now being separated from his sources of supply in the North; the size of his sheet was reduced within weeks of the ordinance and by December 1861 he was forced to print his newspaper on blue wrapping paper.

While Palmer managed to work around these problems, unlike many of his contemporaries, his journal ultimately fell victim to the war itself. In late February 1862, Federal forces under the command of Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks were ordered into the lower Shenandoah Valley to push Confederate forces south, away from the canal-locks and rail-lines along the Potomac River; those forces reached Winchester on March 12, 1862. The offices of both the *Virginian* and its competitor, the *Winchester Republican*, were seized by the occupiers, bringing the publication of both to an abrupt end, leaving Winchester without a journal for the duration of the war. Palmer's office was a particular target because of his long advocacy of secession; after its seizure, printers in the 5th Regiment of Connecticut Volunteers used Palmer's press to issue two numbers (March 18th & 22nd) of *The Connecticut Fifth*, a military-camp paper; when that regiment left the city, the printers either destroyed or took away the seized press, so preventing Palmer from restarting his *Virginian*.

That seizure instilled a life-long hatred in Palmer for all things associated with the Union; he fled to Richmond in May 1862, where he helped resurrect Alexandria's suppressed *Sentinel*, the journalistic voice of Jefferson Davis from 1863 onward; he again fled as Federal forces

entered the burning Confederate capital in April 1865, but returned early that fall; Palmer then tried to secure a new press, apparently intending to continue his excoriations of the federal government and was imprisoned briefly for such overt disloyalty; in early 1866, the "reconstructed" state government recognized by Andrew Johnson the preceding fall elected him as Virginia's first Superintendent of Public Printing, but he was removed from the post by federal authorities in 1869 for his seditious activities. Palmer died in 1879 after falling from a horse, having spent the rest of his working life as a journeyman in Richmond.

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Sources: LCCN nos. 84-025989, 84-025988, 94-055773, 85-025370, 85-025382, 84-025997, & 84-024626; Brigham II: 1166; Cappon 1697 & 1712; Morton, *Winchester*; Russell, *Winchester*; Hyskell, *Early Heiskells*; *American Lutheran Biographies*; notices in the *Alexandria Gazette* (1800-54), *Fincastle Mirror* (1823-26), *Richmond Enquirer* (1837-61), *Niles' Weekly Register* (1837), *National Intelligencer* (1838-49), *Staunton Spectator* (1838-89), [Washington] *Union* (1847-53), *Richmond Dispatch* (1853-1900), and *Norfolk Post* (1865), as well as the *Winchester Centinel/Gazette* (1788-1826) and *Winchester Virginian* (1826-62).